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The Voice of Bataan

THE VOICE OF BATAAN

by Carlos Bulosan

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
AMERICAN-PHILIPPINE FOUNDATION, INC.

BY COWARD-McCANN, INC., NEW YORK

1943

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Published on the same day in the Dominion of Canada
by Longmans, Green & Company, Toronto.*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO AURELIO BULOSAN

I wanted to do something for you, but the years came and went and left a scar in our lives. Then the war came, and our country was taken. There was no more time left for me to make you live in my words again.

I sat down and recorded the beautiful love you showed me, and the wonderful dignity that followed you everywhere, so that all the world will know that somehow there is decency among us. Here it is at last, though it is not the thing I wanted to write for you. It is enough that your brother wrote it—the little sick brother you taught to read by lamplight, because you knew that it is a crime to live in ignorance. Yes, it is enough that I wrote it for you who taught me that it is a great crime to live in misery in a land of abundance.

Maybe you will not come through this war. Maybe I will not live through it. But it is enough that we are living at a time when the cruel forces that scarred our lives are being bared for all humanity to see. I know that if you had two lives you would live again and do what you had already done for me in America.

PREFATORY NOTE

The cultural life of the Philippines, like its political history, is turbulent but potent with unlimited possibilities. The best writers and artists were inevitably the most ardent fighters and revolutionists. A great tradition was started in Spanish times by Filipinos who sacrificed their lives and fortunes for the destruction of tyranny in their country. It is this tradition which has become the foundation of Philippine culture.

We are presenting a manifestation of the cultural heritage of the Filipino people in the form of a long poem, *The Voice of Bataan*. It is difficult to evaluate its artistic and literary qualities, but it is easy to understand its powerful conviction in a philosophy of life worth fighting for in the world. Perhaps for the first time you have the opportunity to know why the Filipino writer is indomitably a revolutionary.

The war is not only a war of battleships and planes, of tanks and soldiers, but it is also a war of men's minds for the islands they have created within them-

selves. It is a war of faiths. But it cannot be won without investigating all our ideals and traditions, without purging ourselves of the insincerities and banalities which have corrupted the machinery of our intellect. The ideas which motivated the war are so explosive and vast in their implications that it is impossible to do away with one wrong without doing away with all wrongs.

Unless our motives in this war are clearly defined, unless we recognize the inner compulsions of our lives, there can be no war worth fighting, no ideal worth living. There can be a lost war only—a war to disintegrate men's minds into dark confusion and barbarism. The dynamic struggle between the new beliefs and the old beliefs beats significantly upon our lives. It beats upon those who are trying to free human values from distortion and suppression; it beats upon the soldier and our conscience with all its force. It is the war of faiths, and the war of ideas; of the intellect which gave birth to the immortal courage of Bataan.

But it is our faith in the future, our common faith in life, which actually binds us together in one positive action. Those who would try to distort our purpose might warn us that civilization is a great lie. But we also give warning to them that truth can never die.

It is the indestructibility of truth which has given life to all our beliefs, which has reinvigorated our common ideals. The war will be fought on many battle-fronts; in the continents that men established within themselves as well as on the islands where they live as a testament of human courage.

The old world is dying, but a new world is being born, generating life from the chaos that beats upon us all. The false grandeur and security, the unfulfilled promises and illusory power, the faith of the dead and those who are about to die, will challenge the force of our courage and honesty with equal force and terror. The old world is dying, dying, so that the new world will be born with less sacrifice and agony on the living.

In coming out with this poem as our first publication since the incorporation of the American-Philippine Foundation, it is not our purpose to honor the heroes of Bataan with words. In that promontory of freedom, Americans and Filipinos fought for each other side by side and back to back with no distinction of color or creed, but with heroism, sacrifice and devotion so great that no word can pay homage to their deed.

The heroes of Bataan have cheated Death, and their finest example of bravery and sacrifice has become

poetry. And out of this world now a-borning, which their deed has made their own sepulchre, will be heard over and over and forever more, audible whispers that travel with the wind.

Listen! It's the voice of Bataan!

E. LLAMAS ROSARIO,
*Secretary and Director of Research,
American-Philippine Foundation, Inc.*

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FOREWORD

When I read his article on one of the Four Freedoms in the *Saturday Evening Post* I asked: "Who is this Carlos Bulosan?"

I learned he was a young Filipino living in Los Angeles, California, and was also given to understand that he is a common laborer. I waited impatiently to hear what so authoritative a voice would say next. Strong new voices are needed to weld the increasing need of understanding between East and West.

Both America and our Philippines needed the new voice of Carlos Bulosan.

I had not long to wait. *The Voice of Bataan* is between the covers of this book and it holds all I had hoped for and more. From the first line it is poetry. It is also Bataan.

Neither of Occident nor Orient, these poems speak with the universal words of mankind. Bulosan's poetry is gusty and powerful and unfamiliar, new and clear

as lucite and yet ageless as his "deathless peace that ancestors carved in stone."

Here is great poetry and here is one of the great poems of the war. Here are *Lidice* and *The White Cliffs*. Supplanting those British crags are the "scarred beaches" of Bataan; displacing the deathless dead of Lidice are our nameless boys with the "anonymous limbs that walked to God."

Yes, here is Bataan, in measures of beauty instead of bloodshed and cordite—a song to be heard through tears. In it are the tears our bravest leaders shed on Bataan where they watched the lines pushed back and the youthful dead piled high.

The Voice of Bataan is made up of some half dozen long poems and each is different in structure and content and all are beautiful. *Escape* is a poem that tears at the memory, and another, *Unknown Soldier*, is a prayer in song no one could read without tears who has ever dared hope for a fairer and sweeter world for his children.

As authentic and lovely as any song in English literature is INTERLUDE; dropped softly into the blood and beauty of the war strophe:

My dear, when you come back,
look for me in the familiar day.

Look under the sound of the wind,
and in the vast tracks of the sky

The world divides in my heart
and the future is a knife in my hand

There is the resonance of Sandburg and Amy Lowell in Bulosan and the love of sound that has made our own Filipino literature distinctive. But beyond all this it is new—it is Bulosan.

He has given us words at last to ease the souls of our unburied dead on Bataan. In this book I find lines for bronze to keep memorable that place of blood and sacrifice. Words for our nameless—our Filipino and American dead:

Bataan! The last island of freedom.
The star of all our living pride.
Bataan! A world! Immortality!

* * *

Build upon their graves
The foundations of a new world. Every grass
That grows untrampled is a flag of freedom.

CARLOS P. ROMULO

PART ONE

Only those are fit to live who are not afraid to die.

—GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR

PROLOGUE

Bataan has fallen.

*With heads bloody but unbowed, we yielded to the
enemy.*

The world will long remember the epic struggle.

We have stood up uncomplaining.

Besieged on land and blockaded by sea,

We have done all that human endurance could bear.

*What sustained us was a force more than merely
physical.*

It was the force of an unconquerable faith:

Something in the soul that is immortal!

It is the thought of native land.

All the world will testify.

Men fighting with an unshakable faith

Are made of something more than flesh;

But we are not made of impervious steel.

The flesh must yield at last,

Endurance melts away,

And the end of the battle must come.

*Bataan has fallen,
But the spirit that made it stand
—A beacon to all the world—
Cannot fall. . . .*

*Our defeat is our victory.**

* The Prologue is a metrical paraphrase of the farewell radio message from Corregidor delivered by Lt. Norman Reyes.

BATAAN

I

Bataan! America's conscience,
Standing at the edge of the world's heart.
A small island of ashes and dead bodies,
Where the brave stood their ground, fighting,
Foodless until they were surrounded, cornered,
Fire on fire falling upon them from the sky;
And the enemy landed, conquered,
As though this island were the world.

Deadly planes scoured the skies,
Submarines nosed the seas—without help,
Without hope for help, they dug into the ground.
The forest rolled downward. All eyes skyward,
They saw the enemy cluster like stars,
Dropping flames numerous as clustering stars.
And they waited for words. But no words came.

II

Bataan! This was our last island,
Built in memory of old victories.

Every fighting man stood his ground,
Watching each other's lives, falling together,
And believing, in each other's care,
Peace for the world rested in their ground.

Not afraid to die, they hugged the tight holes
Until the enemy crept upon them
Who, holding their ground for a brief moment,
Gave the whole world another hope to hold.
As long as their hearts moved, the guns loaded,
And the fighting moved through the jungles
And on to the scarred beaches, until there
Were no more guns to load.

They fought to the last man for our island.
For the world's island, that the world's one world.
Fighting one enemy and one war,
Until there were no more hands to move.
For the hope we live by. For the future we live for.

III

Bataan! The world is but an island.
This the brave knew, creeping on the earth of home,
Holding strength with the other brave,
Those who printed kisses in American streets;
Not for the wound that opened and hurt,

Not for the flesh that burned, but for the hate
That blossomed in treetops and doorways:
The hate that crept from hate to tenderness.

They held the guns straight; plunged down the hill.
They did not stop to consider our promises.
They fought and fell, not for our promises,
Not for victory, but for the day
That would give the future, and kill the enemy.
For the indivisible day.
And toward the end: *No Surrender.*

IV

Bataan! Our fathers knew
The world is but an island, and all men
Fight one war, one enemy. Our age
Called it freedom: one and indivisible.

O America! Until our world's island is won,
Until our freedom is redeemed in freedom,
Until our dead are at peace with the living,
We the living will never rest, will never die with
peace.

The war is a war for life.
The war belongs to all men.

V

Bataan in our heart's island!
We feel every fibre that moves to give wisdom
To the heart, vision to the eyes, seeing all
The brave rise under one star of liberty.
We face the future with one weapon,
All of us holding each other, men and women together,
For one hope, one island, one freedom.

The future is living and real,
Stirring in the conscience of America—
Another hope, another proof to the world,
That Bataan did not fall!

PART TWO

HOSPITAL: FIRST SOLDIER

The hour of decision, world tearing world
In the uncontrollable stream of memory;
The deathless peace that ancestors carved in stone,
Forever changing, but now bleeding in Time's grips.
All the corpses that stared obscenely: shameless
In the background of our lives. Anonymous
Limbs that walked to God, proud and strong,
Clean and pure . . . They pushed forward unafraid,
Tearing through death, here, where the guns uttered;
At first cold, then sharp and hot, then cold again.
"Will they come back to life? O, our brothers!"

The rugged foxholes scrubbed clean. Once stars
Shone upon brave faces, this was true.
And even toward the end no star failed.
We crouched in the earth until we hugged stone
To fire, ourselves afire with truth on our side.
For a brief moment we waited and hoped,
All eyes skyward, burning the sun, the night too:
All hearts stopped, the unutterable word
Smashing, killing the word "love!"

The earth sprang upward, spreading fanwise;
Whispering, the enemy escaped leaving another hour.
Still no word from the living. No word from the dying.

We passed through, tree after tree,
The whole world outside waiting;
Not for victory, not for love,
But for no retreat: *our fate*.

There was fear all night long.
There was bombing all day long. Time stood still.
Except our hearts pulsing, the forest breathed
With the silence of the seven seas.
Speechless, deathless, like the night,
Like first love moving a town, we wished
The bombs would cease falling from the sky.
Then suddenly the dawn came, and gave us hope.
"*Another day. No retreat. Keep fighting.*"
Outside the world was waiting.
Where the living held their anger with two hands,
Pushing through the heavy morning hours, seeing
Our men in utter pain,
And ruin.
While we bled,
The sky darkened, and it rained again.
Now this is all I remember.

PRISON: SECOND SOLDIER

"What is wrong?" "These men we trusted!"

And the answer: Surrender by torture.

By torture alone we were conquered.

Lying about us,
Our motives, our hopes (murder in their hands):

"These men by destiny brothers to us!"

"So we killed them to save them!"

"We swear by the sword we are God's chosen people!"

"We despise civilization!" "Peace is a great lie!"

All through history we heard them speak.

First, about truth as a necessary evil and murder

As an absolute necessity; second, about civilization

As a great lie and culture as an impediment to progress.

A portentous lie!

Why did we brave bullets
That leaped from everywhere? Why did we stop
To consider the grass? Kneel by our dead? . . .

Memory of home under blue sky, and familiar
ground,
Sky blue and fertile; and children, children laughing.

They lied with a lie that echoed:
"What is wrong?" "Did we miss something?"
"Men arrest!" "Bear arms!" "Shoot!"
Military police drove the children and fired on them.
The women died, not surrendering.
And the men said: "We refuse to work!"
They were shot. There were no traitors.

For us, sorrow. We suffered
From the burning of houses. One man's life
Is a story untold, a world
In itself. Make children,
Create civilization—Heroes are born,
Not deathless, but immortal.
Now in the cell I dream of those islands,
Hope of mankind. . . .

JAPAN: THIRD SOLDIER

All through the years, in that mythical land,
We followed the martial voices.
They burned the profound books of history;
The old and new books of science.
They made us believe the power of the sword;
The splendor and glory of conquest. . . .
"Move eastward to the rising sun!" they shouted,
Pounding upon the horrid maps on the tables;
And our planes bombed and burned islands.
Is it splendor to destroy human lives?
Is it glory to ruin cities?

They told us:

"Move southward to the edge of the moon!"
"Move westward!" "Move northward!"
"We are the liberators of the barbaric east!"
"Soon we will dictate policies to the world!"

The whole world! Conquer! Dictate!
Their voices followed us everywhere,
But the banks superimposed our despair.
We hugged the world for comfort.

All guns pointed to our utter defeat.
The journey continued. Exiled from native land,
We thought of the little voices of home.
Time died in our country. . . .
They told us we are the superior men. . . .
Why am I dying in this unknown island?
Why do I remember my son running in the village?
(My son, you will take lessons from *our* defeat.
Run through the village, not with joy but bravery,
And rouse the villagers, our people,
So that all of you can march together
To the shining palaces of the martial men
And the silent, powerful lords,
Who must die to free the whole world. . . .)

Ha! It was a mythical land.
We followed the martial voices.
Leaves fell upon our bodies.
The sun moved to the west.
There were no guns for our defense.
This is all true. . . .

How painful it is to die for defeat.

SONG: INTERLUDE

My dear, when you come back,
look for me in the familiar day.

Look under the sound of the wind,
and in the vast tracks of the sky.

When you come back, look for me
in the passing of warring years.

My dear, look for me only
in the grand havoc of your fears.

And if you come back to me
just to live through another day,

My dear, live only for me;
if you come back to me.

The world divides in my heart,
and the future is a knife in my hand.

My dear, the pain drives me to fear,
and makes all thoughts obsolete.

The fear upon my side is the pain
that burns all my hopes.

It's the hand that touches the future,
and you, my dear, my dear.

ESCAPE: FOURTH SOLDIER

I

Toward the end: the open sea.
We jammed the boat. Journey and exile.
Then Manila, the burning city; Corregidor, surrender.
The enemy: treachery.

Drifting, disaster.

But we drifted away; Australia, safe.
Free and refugee: we heard the fatal news.
Then the planes came southward; the attack came.
Exile now. We remembered the attack in the groves,
The fierce tribesmen leading;
Then forming solid ranks, attacking—
Filipinos! Americanos!
And after a while, the world stood still,
Thought, then understood: victory.
But for a brief moment only.

We saw the ocean spread sunward.
Only anger now; farewell.
Goodbye into home, but forever.

Home from the war. Magellan to Columbus,
Explorers and discoverers, and Filipinas lost behind.
Westward, through captured islands,
Nosing danger, then America: our home.

II

Newsflash: *Escape!*
The captain said: "Escape where?"
We looked. No words came.
In the street, in the restaurant: "*Is there war?*"
Answering, "Tell us what to do!"

Home and exile. These people,
Our friends, our families:
Whenever the planes roared, exile began.
Walking in the morning, war began.
Reading books, the facts of war,
War began.

"We will come back!"

III

The war made our island: *Bataan*.
The last stand, beginning of victory.
On the other side: Stalingrad, Lidice.
The heart of humanity.

The war made our island: *Bataan*.
Bataan! Bataan! The last island of freedom.
The star of all our living pride.
Bataan! A world! Immortality!

IV

And the war; exile, refugee.
We remember all; Barcelona, Manila.
We know. We will not forget.
Bataan. Freedom.

AMERICA: FIFTH SOLDIER

Though desolate their graves stand, praise them.
The winds of hope cry out their names; the heroes
Who, fighting lived their lives over again; dying,
They became immortal among the dead.

You are heroes, too. Consider him from the new
Understanding. Angry, unrepulsed, the brown soldier
Was there, dragging the field gun into position
Until the enemy, savage, cruel, advanced
Through collapsible forests, the trees bending
Against the wind. . . . But he withstood it.
In the night the message came: "He is dead!"

Our first hero. He was a peaceful peasant.
His children cried when he left, passing
Through Pangasinan, Pampanga, Bulacan;
Then circling round toward Bataan, he sat
At the edge of a wide plantation and thought
Of his full wife, who wept in the night.
He said: "War is indivisible."
He won greatness in death.

Now I tell you
I saw it. Our flag cracked and fell.
I saw him running through gunfire;
Jumping over ditches, disappearing; then it
Was there—our flag still flying in the air!

Then he fell, and the earth convulsed.
We rushed; but he was dying.
“Peace is indivisible,” he said.
The day was won. . . .

How little was said, but so much done.
All my life I have lived with workers, and he was one.
I served their cause, because it was my cause.
So much have I done, but so little understand.

Make way for our heroes. Build upon their graves
The foundations of a new world. Every grass
That grows untrampled is a flag of freedom.

PHILIPPINES: SIXTH SOLDIER

And you who live in other lands,
Touched by the murderous hands that wrecked
Our homes and lives, take heed of the lessons
We have written for humanity with our very blood.
This is the hour to take the sword and the gun.
Our enemies will try to stamp us out one by one;
Not only our lives they will crush,
But also the songs we have created in centuries
Of hoping and planning, passed through generations,
Until one day it became the songs of all our lives.
They will destroy our words; the moving spirit
Behind our written words. They will falsify
Our human tenderness and grace;
All that remains of our tenderness and grace.

It is a war for our right to walk erect;
And, walking with perfect bodies,
Our minds are clean and straight,
And pure and forever young. It is a war
Of the body and the mind. It is a war

To end suspicion and fear, decay and lies.
It is a war for all of us; for our right
To dream and hope, to live freely among men
Down the years, living and thinking and saying
Aloud what is in our innermost minds. . . .

We have lived in a portion of the earth
Where the words were all true, and lies were unheard;
And in that corner of the world, trees
Were a part of our lives, and the songs of birds
Were music in our daily toil.
And at nights, all through the years,
We sat with the older people by candlelight
And argued and asked questions,
And the arguments were not distorted,
And the answers were all true and full of wisdom.
In that land the books spoke of our lives:
All the words were written for the glory of our lives.
No child was born to believe the lies.
No man grew up to doubt the truth.
This was our country: the land of humanity.

Can they break down the spirit of our people
With their terrible guns and ships of fear?
Can they blot out our history? Erase the names
Of our great men?

No. They cannot
Conquer. As long as one man lives,
Although he is driven into desperation and insanity,
He will feel his way out of the total darkness,
He will creep through the narrow tunnels of the
world,
He will sit upon the cold portals of life,
He will ask himself and he will remember,
He will remember, he will remember.
He will remember the lessons of our history.
He will remember the words of our great men.
He will remember the words of freedom
That move silently from the spirit of dead men,
Traveling in a thousand secret ways from man to man,
In sign or in books, in music or in stone—
Enriching the mind, making it bold.
As long as one man lives,
He will remember the words of freedom.

O you who live in other lands, listen to us!
We sign this document with our blood.
We bequeath it to all mankind.
We fought the terror that came into our country.
The voices of dead men are immortal in our voices.
The strength of beaten men is deathless in our
strength.

The hope of gagged men; the light of blinded men:
All with us!

 We will rise again
With strong voices. The song of freedom
Will move in our hearts again. We will walk
On the earth with all the hope of dead men.
We will leap through the world like flame,
Cleansing this foul and rotten world,
Where fear and want corrode the minds of men,
Where novel thought and prayer are sins,
Where the soul is corrupted with a thousand lies.

To every one living:
Look into the eyes of your children.
Watch the exile walking in your streets.
We all know the bright word "freedom,"
From the first man who died for it
To the last man who despised it.
All of us today—we are one race of men—
All of us who fight for freedom
With a prayer or a song,
A gun or a written word:
Every one of us,
All of us,
Today!

EPILOGUE: UNKNOWN SOLDIER

For you, my son,
this message is born out of the night,
out of the bitter struggle for a better life,
so that you will reach the tender light of day:

For you, my son,
whom in the spring the flowers will teach
to grow with the changing seasons,
will play with the running wind
and the greening grass;
for you the spring earth will blossom
into a new world,
where new seeds
and new fruits
will nourish you into maturity.

I die for a brighter future.
*But I am ashamed to leave you
an untidy, uncomfortable world,
my son. . . .*

